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THE ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE OF WOMEN.

BY VERNON LEE.

I.

IN recommending Mrs. Stetson's "Women and Economics," through the help of this REVIEW, to my Anglo-Saxon readers, I am accomplishing the duty of a convert. I believe that "Women and Economics" ought to open the eyes and, I think, also the hearts, of other readers, because it has opened my own to the real importance of what is known as the Woman Question.

I must begin by confessing that the question which goes by that name had never attracted my attention, or, rather, that I had on every occasion evaded and avoided it. Not in the least, however, on account of any ridicule which may attach to it. There is, thank goodness, a spice of absurdity in every one, and in every thing, we care for in this world; and the dear little old lady in Henry James's "Bostonians," who pathetically exclaims: "And would you condemn us to remain mere lovely baubles?" is the very creature to endear a *cause*; she is the Brother Juniper, so to speak, of the Woman Question.

My vague avoidance of the movement was not even due to the perception of some of the less enjoyable peculiarities of its devotees. For a very small knowledge of mankind, and a very slight degree of historical culture, suffice to teach one that it is not the well-balanced, the lucid, the sympathizingly indulgent or the especially gracious and graceful among human beings who are employed by Providence for the attack and possible destruction of long-organized social evils; nay, that the martyrdom in behalf of any new cause begins, one may say, by the constitution of the individual as an inevitable eccentric, unconscious of the diffidence, the scepticism, the sympathy, the sense of fitness and measure which check, divert, or hamper normal human beings.

The early saints, judging by St. Augustine's "Confessions" and the "*Legenda Aurea*," must have been appalling prigs, indifferent to family affections, higher literature, hygiene, and rational cookery; while the Hebrew Prophets were quite devoid of their historian's—M. Renan's—intelligent indulgence for the administrative passion of, say, Nebuchadnezzar, or the touching pleasure in *toilettes* of Queen Jezebel. And, as to Socialists, who may be considered as the modern representatives of such virtuous tactlessness, we have all seen something of them, and of their well-meant efforts to clash with our habits of dress and manners, and to ruffle our feelings on trifling occasions. So that it does not require the generalizing genius of Dr. Nordau, clapping Tolstoy and Ibsen into his specimen-box of "Degenerates," to tell us that the Woman Question, Femininism, is likely to be taken up by those disconnected and disjointed personalities who are attracted by every other kind of thing in *ism*; whose power consists a little in their very inferiority; and whose abnormal and often morbid "pleasure in saying 'no'" (as Nietzsche puts it) is, after all, alas! alas! so very necessary in this world of quite normally stupid and normally selfish and normally virtuous "pleasure in saying 'yes.'"

All these things I knew, of course, and I do not really think it was any of them which made me thus indifferent, and perhaps even a little hostile, towards that Woman Question. Indeed, when I seek in the depths of my consciousness, I think the real mischief lay in that word "Woman." For, while that movement was, of course, intended to break down the legal, professional, educational, and social barriers which still exist between the sexes, yet, owing to the fact of its necessarily pitting one of these sexes against the other; owing to the inevitable insistence on what *can*, or *cannot*, or *must*, or *must not*, be done, said, or thought by women and not men—women—women—women—always women! there naturally arose a certain feeling, pervading, overpowering, intolerable—like that one suffers from in visiting a harem or a convent—the fact of sex, exclusive, aggressive, immodestly out of place, perpetually obtruded on one's consciousness; while the other fact, the universal, chaste, spiritual fact of *humanness*, of *Homo* as distinguished from mere *Vir* and *Femina*, was lost sight of. And somehow—if one is worth one's salt, if one feels normal kinship not only with the talking and

(occasionally) thinking creature around one, but also with animals, plants, earth, skies, waters, and all things past and present; if one be able, as every decent specimen of genus *Homo* must, to join in Francis of Assisi's "*Laudes omnium creaturarum*"—why, then, one feels a little bored, a little outraged, nay, even sickened, by this everlasting question of sex qualifications and sex disqualifications; and (very unjustly, but perhaps therefore very naturally) one gets to shrink from that particular question exactly because it is the *Woman Question*.

Very unjustly. Let me repeat that; and remind the reader that what I am describing is my still unregenerate state.

II.

I was converted by Mrs. Stetson's unpretending little book, because in it the rights and wrongs of *Femina, das Weib*, were not merely opposed to the rights and wrongs of *Vir, der Mann*, but subordinated to those of what is, after all, a bigger item of creation: *Homo, der Mensch*.

There was nothing new in connecting the Woman Question with Economics. If I may judge by myself, the majority of people who know anything of Political Economy must be accustomed to regard such questions as marriage, divorce, prostitution, the legal position of mothers and fathers, and many of the peculiarities of law and custom with respect to the sexes, as hinging upon the facts of wealth production and distribution, tenure of soil, heredity and division of property; upon the whole immense question of the individual's share in the products of nature, of invention and of industry. Indeed, I much suspect that, as in my case, many thinking persons shelve the question of women's abilities and disabilities exactly because it seems to depend almost completely upon the far more important question of the redistribution of wealth; to represent a minor act of social justice and social practicality (bringing much waste energy under cultivation) inevitably involved in the greater act of social justice and social practicality which, through revolution or evolution, must needs take place some day or other.

The originality, the scientific soundness and moral efficacy of "Women and Economics," appear to me to lie in its partially reversing this fact; and in its substituting a moral and psychological reason for the rather miraculous mechanicalness which

mars every form of the "historical materialism" of the Marxian school. In other words, this book shows that the present condition of women—their state of dependence, tutelage, and semi-idleness; their sequestration from the discipline of competition and social selection, in fact their economic parasitism—is in itself a most important factor in the wrongness of all our economic arrangements.

This main thesis of the book can be summed up as follows:

In consequence of the immense benefit which a prolonged stage of infancy, that is to say of intellectual and moral plasticity, obtained for the human race, all other advantages tended, during the beginnings of civilization, and have tended ever since, to be sacrificed to the rearing of children; and, first and foremost, there has been sacrificed to it that equality in the power of obtaining sustenance, and that consequent mutual independence in such matters, which we find existing between the male and female half of almost every other race of animal. The human race has obtained much of its superiority through the partial replacing of instinct by individual experiment and conscious tradition; but this has meant that the human infant has been born into the world far less mature, far less typically developed, and far less near to independence than the young sheep which can walk within half an hour of its birth, let alone of the chick which can find the right seed almost as soon as it has broken out of the shell. In proportion as the human adult has become rich in original powers, has the human infant required a longer and longer period of tutelage; with the result of requiring of the human mother a longer and longer devotion of her strength, her mind, and, even more, of her time, to the rearing of her offspring. The difference between the female of genus *homo* and the female of other genera has therefore originated not in a longer period of gestation (for that of the horse, for instance, is nearly one-third longer), but in a longer period of education of her offspring. The different position of the female whom we call *Woman* is not due to a difference in psychological, but in sociological functions.

For the longer duration of human infancy, and, even more, the greater helplessness, the greater educability of the human infant, have made it difficult, and in some cases impossible, for the human mother to find food for herself, let alone food for her

growing and already weaned child. Hence, the continuance of the human race has called forth a personage who (save among birds, so oddly like human beings in many things) can scarcely be said to exist among animals: the Father—the Father, as distinguished from the mere begetter; the pseudo-father in many stages of primitive life (without ironical references to later stages of existence!), the uncle, the maternal male relative, the head of the tribe, the patriarch: the man who provides food for the child, and food for the woman who rears it; the man who procures, by industry, or violence, a home (cave, cabin, tent, or house) in which the woman remains with the children, while he himself goes forth to hunt, to tend flocks, to make captives, to till the ground, to buy and sell; and in modern times to do those hundred curious things which, producing no tangible product, come under the heading of “making money.”

This all seems very simple; but the consequences are complex. The female *homo*, thus left to rear the children (and do what else she can), becomes, what the female of other animals is not, or only (in birds and certain lower creatures) for a very short time, the *dependent* of the male *homo*. The home which she inhabits is *his* home, the food she eats is *his* food, the children she rears become, whether father or only patriarch, *his* children; and, by a natural evolution, she herself, the woman thus dependent upon his activity and thus appropriated to his children's service, becomes part and parcel of the home, of the goods, of the children; becomes appropriated to the nursing, the cooking, the clothing, the keeping in repair; becomes, thus amalgamated with the man's property, a piece of property herself, body and soul, a slave (often originally a captive, stolen or bought), and what every slave naturally is, a chattel. By this process, therefore, we have obtained a primitive human group, differing most essentially from the group composed by the male and female of other genera: the man and the woman, *vir ac femina*, do not stand opposite one another, he a little taller, she a little rounder, like Adam and Eve on the panels of Memling or Kranach; but in a quite asymmetrical position: a big man, as in certain archaic statues, holding in his hand a little woman; a god (if we are poetical, or if we face the advantages of the case) protecting a human creature; or (if we are cynical, and look to the disadvantages) a human being playing with a doll.

III.

In his remarkable book, "*Division du Travail Social*," M. Emile Durkheim writes as follows:

"The female of those remotest ages was by no means the feeble being that she has gradually become as a result of increasing morality. Pre-historic bones make it quite plain to us that, in those earliest times, there was much less difference of strength than we find nowadays between the two sexes. And even now, we find that during childhood the skeletons of the male and female present but little difference; the characteristic being, on the whole, rather feminine. If, therefore, we admit that the growth of the individual reproduces, so to speak, on a small scale, the development of the species, then we may fairly conjecture that the same similarity between the sexes existed at the beginning of human evolution, and we may regard the feminine form as an approximation to that original single type of humanity, from which the masculine variety has gradually become differentiated.

"As regards the highest organ of physical and psychical life, it has been shown by Dr. Lebon, with mathematical precision, that the brain of both sexes must have originally presented just such a degree of similarity. The comparison of a large number of skulls, selected among the most different races and civilizations, has led him to the following conclusion: that, if we compare individuals of the same age, the same stature and weight, the brain of the male will be found to be considerably bulkier than that of the female; and that this inequality increases regularly with the increase of civilization; in such a way that the brain and, therefore, the mind of the woman is constantly tending to differ, to her disadvantage, from the brain and the mind of the man. For instance, the difference found to exist between the average skulls of modern Parisians of the two sexes is almost double the difference which exists between the male and female skulls of the ancient Egyptians. A German anthropologist, Bischoff, has come to the same conclusions on this subject as Dr. Lebon. This anatomical resemblance is accompanied by similarity of function. For, in those early civilizations, the feminine functions are not sharply marked off from the masculine ones; on the contrary, the two sexes lead very much the same life. There are even nowadays a considerable number of savage races where the woman takes her share in political life. This has been remarked more especially among the American Indians, like the Iroquois and Natchez; also at Hawaii, where the female shares the life of the men in a hundred ways; also in New Zealand and Samoa. Similarly, it is not rare to find the women accompanying their men on warlike expeditions, urging them on in the fray and even taking an active part in it. In Cuba and in Dahomey also they are as warlike as the men, and fight by their side. . . . Now, it is to be observed that, among all these peoples, the institution of marriage is extremely rudimentary. . . . We are acquainted with a type of family, comparatively near us in time, and which possesses only a germ, so to speak, of marriage: we allude to the *maternal family* . . . In this,

marriage, or what goes by the name of marriage, consists in but few obligations, frequently limited also in duration, which bind the husband to the wife's relations. . . . Whereas, the further we advance, and the nearer we draw to modern times, the more also do we see marriage take on in complexity. . . . And it is certain that, at the same time, we find a greater and greater division of labor as between the two sexes. . . . For ages past woman has withdrawn from warfare and public business and concentrated all her activities within the limits of the individual family. And the part which she plays has become only more and more specialized; so that nowadays, and among civilized nations, the female leads a life absolutely different from that of the male. It is as if the two great halves of the soul's life had become severed, and as if one of the two sexes had appropriated the emotional functions and the other the functions of the intellect."

I am very glad to have been able to give the readers of this REVIEW, instead of a *précis* of parts of "Women and Economics," the above quotation on the subject of that equality of faculties and community of functions which may (or may not) have originally existed between the two halves of genus *homo*, and upon that subsequent differentiation which resulted in what M. Durkheim has aptly and joyfully defined as a "stationary or even retrograde tendency in the female skull. For, to such readers as have reason (perhaps owing to their superior knowledge) for giving much weight to similar statements about prehistoric civilizations; and to such readers also as feel that the fact of having possessed any particular desideratum in the past constitutes a better claim to its possession in the future; to both these classes of readers, it must be much more satisfactory to be assured of the original and primeval importance of womankind by M. Durkheim, who jubilates at the "*stationnement et régression des crânes féminins*" as a splendid argument in favor of thorough-going division of labor, than to take it on the authority of Mrs. Stetson herself, who may be suspected of partiality for hypotheses redounding to the glory of our earliest mothers.

I am also glad to have devolved, so to speak, the *onus probandi* of the original equality of male and female skulls, of the primitive similarity of habits, functions, and powers of the two sexes, and particularly the responsibility for that uncertain spectre, the "Matriarch," on to an adversary of female emancipation; because I suspect that, in the undeveloped state of anthropology and prehistoric sociology, the alleged facts and cherished hypotheses of one day are sure to be upset the next. And also

because I have a very strong feeling that the desirability of any particular thing in the future has nothing to do with its existence or non-existence in the past; and that the question of the position of women, say, in the year 2000 A.D., will depend not upon the position of women in the year—well, the year 20,000 before the Deluge—but upon the condition of the world at large, the intellectual, moral, particularly the economical state of men and women, in our own times.

IV.

Now the really fine piece of work which Mrs. Stetson has done, has been to demonstrate—to me at least—that, although the exclusion of womankind from the world's active work, and her subordination to man, have been a sociological necessity—the price paid for the lengthened infancy, the increased educability of man, and also for that solid familial organization which alone permitted an accumulation and multiplication of human inventions and traditions; that, although the *regression*, or, at all events, the stagnation of one half of the human race has been inevitable and beneficial in the past, it has ceased to be beneficial, and is ceasing to be inevitable, in the present. A particular automatic arrangement of historical evolution has done its work; like slavery, like servage, like feudalism, like centralization (according to individualists), like competition (according to socialists), it has grown to be an impediment to progress. For the prolonged infancy and youth of genus *homo* can now no longer be endangered; and a large proportion of human education has, since thousands of years, passed from the care of the mother to that of the community as a whole, or of portions—guilds, priesthoods, universities, and so forth—of the community; while, on the other hand, the inventions and traditions have been stored, multiplied, and diffused far beyond the powers of family education. The benefit has long, long ago been obtained beyond all possibility of loss; but the price is still being paid for it.

Now, what is that price? The stagnation or regression, answers M. Durkheim, of the female mind. The removal, answers Mrs. Stetson, enlarging the same thought with a different intention, the removal of womankind from the field of action and reaction called “the universe at large” to the field of action and reaction called “the family circle”; the substitution, as a factor of adap-

tation and selection, of the preference of the husband or possible husband for the preferences, so to speak, of the whole of creation. In other words, the sequestration of the capacities of one half of the human race, and their enclosure inside the habits and powers of the other half of the human race. Briefly, a condition in which the man plays the part of the animal who moves and feeds freely on the earth's surface; and the woman the part of the parasitic creature who lives inside that animal's tissues. The comparison is exact; but we ought not to push the analogy to the point of considering the parasitism of womankind as the parasitism of a destructive microbe. The mischief lies not in the fact of parasitism, but in the fact that this parasitic life has developed in the parasite one set of faculties and atrophied another; atrophied the faculties which the woman had (or might have had, even if in lesser degree) in common with the man, and developed those which were due to the fact of her being a woman.

We have come to a point where a clear understanding is very necessary. Even admitting that chastity, devotion to offspring, tenderness, and that peculiar negative quality (called after the domesticated animal) *mansuetude*, let alone certain æsthetic graces which the ancients by no means discovered in womankind, have come to exist in the female as the result of her dependent position, [a theory which is seriously damaged by the coyness in courtship and the maternal passion observable already in animals where the female is not dependent], we must be careful to add this gain to the other advantages, and main advantages, of "feminine stagnation or regression," namely, the prolongation of childhood and the establishment of the family group. And we must not gratuitously argue that these virtues will disappear if the position of women is changed; since, whatever their origin, they have become so far common to both sexes that Christianity and Buddhism have for centuries been taking for granted that chastity, mansuetude, and tenderness are the most essential virtues of mankind at large, the "one thing needful."

But the question arises, What price has been paid for all these advantages?

The first answer which arises in the mind is naturally a direct one: the work which womankind might have accomplished during those hundreds and hundreds of years if she had not had a man to work for her; the work which might have been given by two

halves of the human race, instead of being given by one only. But here again we have need for a *distinguo*, though not a casuistic one. The woman did do work throughout that time. Not merely the essential work, direct and indirect, of rearing a new generation and, in a measure, keeping up the acquired standard of civilization; but also the work, less essential indeed to the race, which enabled the man not merely to seek for food away from the home, but also to be as idle as he required (or at least as he liked) while in it. The woman, save among the exceptionally wealthy, has always been a chief domestic servant; and even nowadays she is so, to a greater or lesser extent. The woman, therefore, has worked; but—and here comes the subtle distinction on which the whole economic and sociological part of the subject reposes—she has worked not for the consumption of the world at large, and subject to the world's selection of good or bad, useful or useless, work; but for the consumption of one man and subject to that one man's preferences. The woman has worked without thereby developing those qualities which competition has developed among male workers. She has not become as efficient a human being as her brothers; whatever her individual inherited aptitudes (and, as Mrs. Stetson aptly reminds us, women are, after all, the children of men as well as of women, and must, therefore, inherit some of their father's natural powers), she has not been allowed to develop them in the struggle for life; but has been condemned, on the contrary, to atrophy them in forms of labor which can require only the most common gifts, since they are required equally of every woman in every family.

But this is by no means the whole of the price which the human race has had to pay for the needful "division of labor" between its two halves. Negatively, the position of women has prevented their developing certain of their possibilities; positively, it has forced them to develop certain other of their possibilities; it has atrophied the merely human faculties, which they possess rudimentarily in common with men; it has, on the other hand, hypertrophied the peculiarity which distinguished them from man; hypertrophied their sex.

There is one particular sentence in "Women and Economics" which converted me to the cause of female emancipation: "Women are over-sexed."

V.

Women over-sexed! *Over-sexed!* There seems something odious and almost intolerable in that word. In the fact also—but odious and intolerable in a manner more subtle and more serious than mere scandalized modesty can ever understand. Let me try to explain the extreme importance of Mrs. Stetson's thought. *Over-sexed* does not mean over-much addicted to sexual indulgence; very far from it, for that is the case not with women, but with men, of whom we do not say that they are *over-sexed*. What we mean by *over-sexed* is that, while men are a great many things besides being males—soldiers and sailors, tinkers and tailors, and all the rest of the nursery rhyme—women are, first and foremost, *females*, and then again females, and then—still more females. It is a case for paraphrasing Danton; only that, alas! there is a considerable difference between “*de l'audace, de l'audace et encore de l'audace*” and “*de la femme, de la femme, et encore de la femme,*” which sums up the outspoken views of the Latin races, and the practice, alas! of the less outspoken but more practical Teutonic ones. And here we touch the full mischief. That women are *over-sexed* means that, instead of depending upon their intelligence, their strength, endurance, and honesty, they depend mainly upon their sex; that they appeal to men, dominate men through the fact of their sex; that (if the foregoing seems an exaggeration) they are economically supported by men because they are wanted as wives and mothers of children—that is to say, wanted for their sex. And it means, therefore, by a fearful irony, that the half of humanity which is constitutionally (and by the bare facts of motherhood) more chaste, has unconsciously and inevitably acquired its power, secured its livelihood, by making the other half of humanity less chaste, by appealing through every means, material, æsthetic and imaginative, sensual or sentimental, to those already excessive impulses and thoughts of sex. The woman has appealed to the man, not as other men appeal to him, as a comrade, a competitor, a fellow-citizen, or an open enemy of different nationality, creed, or class; but as a possible wife, as a female. This has been a cause of weakness and degradation to the man; a “fall,” like that of Adam; and, in those countries where literature is thoroughly outspoken, man, like Adam, has thrown the blame on Eve, as the instrument of the Devil.

This is, of course, particularly the case among our Continental neighbors, more outspoken than we upon all sexual questions, and unhampered by the thought of Thackeray's Erubescant Young Person. The old, old story is repeated with slight variations from Schopenhauer down to Nietzsche, and from Michelet down to Dumas *fils*. I think it may be studied best in the works of this very humanitarian though amusing dramatist.

"Well, then," asks Mme. Leverdet in his "*Ami des Femmes*," "what conclusion have you come to as a result of your studies of womankind? You needn't mind telling me, for I am a *femme d'esprit*."

"My conclusion," answers De Ryons, the *Ami des Femmes*—"my conclusion is that Woman, such as she exists at present, is a creature entirely illogical, inferior, and harmful—'*un être illogique, subalterne et malfaisant*.'"

The admirable preface of the play, and the whole tenor of the author's works, show that the younger Dumas is making use of the personage of De Ryons to speak his own innermost convictions, and that these are the convictions of a very sincere and very disheartened moralist. As such, they are well worthy of our attention; and—in the light of Mrs. Stetson's words, "Women are over-sexed"—they ought to carry more weight than a cargo of "Woman Question" pamphlets. In the first place, Dumas *fils* is rebelling against the poetical lie, covering so much ugly prose, that "Love is enough." Rebelling, that is to say, against the narrowing of that great word *love* down to a single one of its possible meanings; rebelling against the notion that the power of loving, of giving one's self, body and soul, which is necessary for the efficacy and dignity of all human labor, of all human relationship, should be expended solely in the passion of a man for a woman. He sees and he preaches how small a part sex has a right to play in this big and complex world, how episodic a part in the wide and varied human life. And he sees that the danger and the evil come from what we have learned to call the over-sexed woman, but which he calls, like every Frenchman, merely *La Femme*.

For he is himself that *Femme's* first and foremost victim; he believes in that fearful neo-Latin abstraction as in an inevitable reality. Similar in this to so very different a man as Michelet, Dumas describes *La Femme* as if she were a single and invariable

type, and, moreover, also the type of a disease. It is altogether impossible to translate into English the particular words which either Michelet or Dumas (I forget which) has coined as expressive of the intimate nature of womankind. But in another place Michelet defines the object of his love and pity, of his very honest "*Frauendienst*"—as "*la femme, toujours faible et souvent furieuse.*"

Dumas, however, is not inferior to Michelet in physiological lore, particularly of the kind offered to the world by men of science rather hungry than scrupulous. In this preface of "*L'Ami des Femmes*," we have a list of all the possible varieties of *La Femme*, with inventories of her peculiarities, from the lines in her hands to the shape and consistence of her calves, let alone the smoothness or crispness of hair, the flatness or sharpness of nose, the skin which is either always warm or always cold, and those curious olfactory details which prove that, so far as French writers are concerned, it is quite untrue that genus *homo* is inferior to the canine race in the faculty of scent. Physiologically and sociologically, Dumas believes unhesitatingly in the existence of *La Femme*. And believing in her as such, he sees in her a horrible danger to man's moral progress; he sees her attack him, grapple with him, destroy him, in her capacity not of human being, of competitor, of enemy, but in her capacity of woman, of mistress or wife. Against this danger man must eternally struggle; the creature made in God's image must be saved from this diseased piece of its own flesh. Man must diminish the power of woman by diminishing his own sensuality and folly. One feels all through this laughing cynicism a sort of priestly rage at the impossibility of finding out some better mode of continuing the race.

Meanwhile, there women are, and the only thing is to be exceedingly wise and consistent and austere with them; not to be unjust or angry with their miserable nature, which is not any fault of theirs; besides, and that is the worst of it, these sirens, these man-destroying monsters, do everything to make themselves agreeable; these dangerous wild beasts are, alas! charming.

VI.

All this is mere literary exaggeration. There have been an enormous number of most useful women in the world, Mrs. Fry,

Queen Elizabeth, Joan of Arc, the mother of the Gracchi; and, as a fact, it is these selfsame Latin countries, with all their filthy talk about *La Femme*, her ailments and powers, that bore us Anglo-Saxons almost equally with their talk about the miraculous virtues of *La Mère*, who is, after all, only *La Femme*—well, as the Latins would put it, when she is too old or too busy to be *La Femme*.

Doubtless. And it is not “Women and Economics,” nor I, its converted expounder, who give so inordinate an importance to the influence of the over-sexed woman upon the moral cleanliness, the chastity, of mankind; it is the very people, like Dumas, who believe, which we do not, in the universal existence and eternal duration of *La Femme*.

Mrs. Stetson has mentioned this aspect of the question, and I have followed her example, because it is certainly an important one. But Mrs. Stetson has taught me to see that there is another aspect, more important by far. The fostering of vices, especially of vices so harmful to the race as those presided over by *La Femme*, is a very grave mischief; but vices, from their very nature, are more or less exceptional and tend to die out. And a far more serious evil consists in the wasting and perverting of virtues, the systematic misapplication of healthy feelings and energies. Now, the chief point made by the author of “Women and Economics,” the point which, as it converted myself, ought to convert many others from indifference to the Woman Question, is concerned with the misapplication and waste of the productive energies and generous impulses of men, thanks to the necessity of providing not only for themselves and their offspring, but for a woman who has been brought up not as a citizen, but as a parasite, not as a comrade, but as a servant, or—well, consider the word even in its most sentimental and honorable sense—as a lover. The economic dependence of women (however inevitable and useful in the past) has not merely limited the amount of productive bodily and mental work at the disposal of the community, but it has very seriously increased the mal-distribution of that work and of its products by creating, within the community, a system of units of virtuous egoism, a network of virtuous rapacity which has made the supposed organic social whole a mere gigantic delusion. Virtuous egoism, and virtuous rapacity; for *it is* virtuous on the man’s part, husband or intending

husband, to sacrifice himself for another human being, and the consciousness of the virtue enables the sacrifice to be extended, with a clear conscience, to the interests of the community at large. A man has to be first a good father and husband, and then, with such honesty as remains over, a good citizen.

“Such honesty as remains over! Sacrifice of the community to the wife and children!” you exclaim. “Why, this accusation of yours against the modern man and the modern woman is far more really dreadful than any of that French rubbish about *La Femme* and her victims!” Exactly so; and a great deal more important, because it is a great deal truer and more sweeping. The very fact of its truth not being recognized merely goes to prove how extraordinarily our moral sense in economic matters has been perverted (or has failed to grow), owing to the fact of the man having to supply the material wants and satisfy the caprices not only of himself, but of that “better”—or worse—self who sees the world only through his eyes, and damages the world only through his hands. It is not a question of cheating or robbing; I am not a collectorist. I believe no more in the rights of labor than in the rights of property, and I have no reason for supposing that the author of “*Women and Economics*” does so either. Our moral obtuseness is, on the contrary, proved irrefutably by our always connecting the idea of dishonesty with such narrow and crass categories as cheating and robbery—cheating and robbery which can be practised only against individuals, and on very rare occasions; besides being severely, perhaps almost too severely, punished. What cannot be punished (but is on the contrary praised and admired, when successful) is exactly the chronic and all-pervading preference of the interest of the individual as against the interest of the community, the debasing of the standard of work and the quality of products. Now, this kind of dishonesty triumphs not merely in commerce and industry (perhaps almost least there, where most visible), but in all the professions which are exercised, and in many cases (bureaucracies of all kinds, civil and ecclesiastic, and who shall say how large a portion of our supposed necessary military system?) are kept in useless existence merely because men have to make a living. “*Je n’en vois pas la nécessité*”: the minister might make that simple answer to the unmarried parasite, office-seeker, or journalist, or whatever he was; but no minister, however cynical,

would dare to question the married man's right—nay, his duty—to support his wife and family, or, more strictly, his wife.

I repeat: *more strictly his wife*; because it is, in reality, not the unborn children, or even the born children, who decide the "standard of living;" but the wife, extremely on the spot, and already accustomed both to a certain degree of expenditure as a reality, and, what is quite as important, to a certain expenditure as an ideal in the future. Even the poorest paupers contrive to rear offspring; and, by a melancholy irony, the greater part of the world's most necessary work happens to be done by people "whose dear papa was poor," as Stevenson makes the good little boy express it. No, no, it is not the children who ask for carriage horses, toilettes, and footmen, or (in more sordid spheres) for the Ibsenian "home for happy people," with its one overworked drudge and its preoccupation about the husband's dinner. It is not even the children who clamor for nurse-maids and governesses and expensive schools: it is the wife.

VII.

"*Tout cela a été fait pour casser,*" remarks Nana, after one of her bouts of destruction. Reputable women do not, usually, while away a dull morning like Zola's ingenuous courtesan; they do not set to tearing and smashing. But the only difference, very often, is that while the light lady destroyed in a couple of hours the product of many men's and many months' labor, the virtuous woman of the well-to-do classes, and of the classes (more numerous and important) aspiring or pretending to such well-to-do-ness, alters, discards, throws away more gradually those objects which are no longer consonant with "what one *has* to have," and whose continued use would therefore suggest the horrid thought that the family was not really well-off; in eminently business countries the thought that the husband's *business* was not thriving. "It is good for trade," remark the more responsible among these ladies, unconsciously echoing a reflexion of that same Nana. It is good for trade: and so is a town being burnt down, or swallowed up by an earthquake, or washed away by a tidal wave. It makes room for more objects (dresses, crockery, furniture, houses, or human beings); but, meanwhile, you have wasted those that were already there, and all the labor and capital they have cost to produce.

But the spirit of wastefulness is by no means the worst correlative among women of the spirit of rapacity, of "getting wealth, not making it," as Mrs. Stetson luminously describes it, which the economic dependence of the wife develops (as a virtue, too!) in the husband. An enormous amount of the hardness in bargaining, the readiness to take advantage, the willingness to use debasing methods (such as our modern hypnotizing advertisement system), the wholesale acceptance of intellectual and moral, if not material, adulteration of work and its products—correspond in the husband to what is honored as thrift, as *good management*, in the wife. It is more than probable that the time wasted, the bad covetousness excited, the futile ingenuity exercised by the women who crowd round the windows of our great shops and attend their odious "sales," are really the result of a perverted possibility of virtue.

For the man's virtue is to *make money*; the woman's virtue is to *make money go a long way*. And, between the two virtues, we are continually told that a business house cannot give better wages and shorter hours because it would be "crowded out of the market"; and we are told also, by more solemn moralists still, that nations cannot do without war, lest they lose their "commercial outlets," or fail to secure those they have not got.

Who can object? All these people are good husbands and good wives; the home is the pivot of our morality. And the most disheartening thing is, that all this is true.

VIII.

How do you propose to remedy it? By what arrangements do you expect to make the wife the economic equal of her husband, the joint citizen of the community?

I propose nothing, because I do not know. All I feel sure of is, that if people only want a change sufficiently strongly and persistently, that change will work out its means in one way or another. Which way? is a question often unanswerable, because the practical detail depends upon other practical details which the continuance of the present state of things is hiding from us, or even forbidding. And because, moreover, we are surrounded on all sides by resources which become available only in connection with other resources, and only under the synthetic power of desire. The lids of boiling kettles went on rising all

through Antiquity and the Middle Ages; but the notion of using that expansive movement of steam could not occur until people had already got roads and mariner's compasses and mechanical mills, and until people were beginning to find stage-coaches and sailing vessels and wind-mills and water-mills a little unsatisfactory. The integration of women as *direct* economic, and therefore *direct* moral and civic, factors in the community, is not a more difficult question than the question of the integration of the laboring classes into the real life of nations; and yet the "social question" will find, some day, its unexpected solution; and the "Woman Question" will, very likely, have to be settled beforehand.

Have to be settled? I would have said "settle itself," for that is more like my meaning, if it were not that I wish to insist that questions do not *settle themselves* satisfactorily, unless we wish and help them to do so. It is for the sake of such increase of wish for a change in the economic position of women, or, at all events, a diminution of the present very strong prejudice against such a change, that the discussion of ways and means appears, to me at least, principally useful. I do not agree with Mrs. Stetson's suggestion of our eventually living in a kind of hotel, or at least dining permanently in a restaurant; but the discussion of such a plan, odious as it appears to me, is infinitely useful in accustoming us to the thought that some arrangement will require to be devised for delivering women from the necessities of housekeeping. I see some similar usefulness even in discussions about the future of women (including the possibility of that famous "third sex" which haunts the imagination of the Latin believers in *La Femme*), such as I. H. Rosny has introduced (I scarcely know whether as a joke or not) into his "*Chemin d'Amour*."

Besides this fact, the one thing certain about the future of women is, surely, that they ought to be given a chance, by the removal of legal and professional disabilities, if not of becoming different from what they have been, at all events of showing what they really are. For one of the paradoxes of this most paradoxical question is precisely that, with all our literature about *La Femme*, and all our violent discussions, economical, physiological, psychological, sociological (each deciding according to some hypothesis of his immature science), as to what women must or

must not be allowed to do, and what women must and must not succeed or fail in, we do not really know what women *are*. Women, so to speak, as a natural product, as distinguished from women as a creation of men; for women, hitherto, have been as much a creation of men as the grafted fruit tree, the milch cow, or the gelding who spends six hours in pulling a carriage, and the rest of the twenty-four standing in a stable.

One of the very great uses of Mrs. Stetson's most useful book is to accustom those who *can* think, to think in terms of change, of adaptation, of evolution; to free us from the superstition that the present is the type of the eternal, and that our preferences of to-day are what decide the fate of the universe. *Woman*—even letting alone *La Femme*—is, so to speak, the last scientific survival of the pre-Darwinian belief in the invariability of types; *Woman*, I may add, is almost a relic of the philosophy of the Middle Ages; for has not *woman* an *essence*, something quite apart from herself, an essence like the "*virtus dormitiva*" of opium (not always so tranquillizing), an essential quality of being—well, being a woman?

One word more. There is a notion, founded in the main on the facts of a period of struggle, segregation of interests, and general uncomfortable transition, that if women attain legal and economic independence, if they get to live, bodily and intellectually and socially, a life more similar, I might say more symmetrical, to that of men, they will necessarily become—let us put it plainly, less attractive to possible husbands. Of course they will; if they have changed, they will no longer realize the ideal of gracefulness, beauty, and loveliness of the particular men who like them just as they are; but then those particular men will themselves probably no longer exist. Moreover, there is, undoubtedly, a certain correlation between the qualities of the two sexes, due to the fact, which we are all of us (not only M. Durkheim with his "division of labor") inclined to forget, namely, that the woman is, after all, not merely the *wife* (since that noble word must be put to such mean use) of the man, but also his daughter, his sister, and his companion; and that, as such, he requires her to be not *unlike*, but *like* himself. There is, if we watch for it, a family resemblance, after all, between the men and women of the same country. I was very much struck, while at Tangier, by the fact that the husbands of those veiled and painted Moorish women

were themselves so oddly like women in men's clothes, those languid Moors lolling in their shops, with black beards which looked almost as if they had been gummed on to their delicate white faces: the ultra-feminine woman belonged, quite naturally, to the effeminate man. In a similar way, the "masculine" Englishwoman, fox-hunting, Alpine-climbing, boating, is the natural companion of the out-of-door, athletic, sporting, colonizing Englishman; she has been taught by her big brothers during their holidays "*not to be a muff*"; she has learned to be ashamed of the things "the boys" would be ashamed of. And, living as I do equally among Latins and Anglo-Saxons, I have got to guess that, if the Latins see a "third sex" in a portion of Anglo-Saxon womankind, the Anglo-Saxons, on the other hand, have a vague but strong feeling that a corresponding category might be found among the Latin males morally emasculated by belief in *La Femme*. For if *manly* be an adjective denoting certain virtues, and *effeminate* an adjective denoting certain weaknesses, you may be sure that the same civilization, the same habits and preferences, will produce more of the one than of the other in all the members of a race, just because they do belong to the same race.

And let me remind Mrs. Stetson's readers that it is just the most æsthetic, but also the most athletic, people of the past which has left us those statues of gods and goddesses in the presence of whose marvellous vigor and loveliness we are often in doubt whether to give the name of Apollo, or that of Athena.

VERNON LEE.